



January 2026 Tribal Nation Newsletter

January 30, 2026 | [Universal Service Administrative Company \(USAC\)](#)



[E-Rate](#)

The FY2026 FCC Form 471 Filing Window is Now Open

The Funding Year (FY) 2026 FCC Form 471 application filing window opened Wednesday, January 21, 2026, and will close on Wednesday, April 1, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. ET.

Below are important dates for FY2026:

- FY2026 FCC Form 470 (The First Form): Wednesday, March 4, 2026 is the last date that you can submit and certify an FCC Form 470 and still wait the required minimum 28-day period before submitting and certifying your FCC Form 471 by the deadline (below).
- FY2026 FCC Form 471 (The Second Form): Wednesday, April 1, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. ET is the deadline for submitting your FCC Form 471 before the application filing window closes.

The FCC Forms 470 and 471 must be filed in the [E-Rate Productivity Center \(EPC\)](#). The dates and times above apply to the time the form is certified in EPC. If you complete all the required information on the FCC Form 471 before the deadline but certify it after the deadline, the FCC Form 471 will not be considered as timely filed.

Please note that Tribal College and University (TCU) libraries that also serve as a public library to their communities are eligible to apply for and receive E-Rate funding.

If you are a Tribal library, TCU library, or help Tribal libraries, and would like further assistance with applying for and receiving E-Rate funding, please consider joining the [Tribal Library E-Rate Advocacy Program \(T-LEAP\)](#). T-LEAP provides one-to-one assistance and other support to Tribal libraries and TCU

libraries that are new to the E-Rate program.

New Category Two (C2) Budget Cycle

The FCC Form 471 was updated to reflect the FY2026-2030 [Category 2 Budget](#) cycle. The **Entity Details** section on the **Category Two screen** in EPC now shows FY2026-2030 Category Two budget cycle data based on the latest entity profile information entered by applicants during the FY2026 [EPC Administrative Window](#). The FCC Form 471 PDF copy for Category Two applications was updated to reflect this latest entity profile data for student counts (schools/school districts) and square footage (libraries/library systems) for the FY2026-2030 budget cycle. FY2026 is the first year of the C2 budget cycle, and all budgets will be verified by USAC. We recommend that you have all information on hand to validate your budget data, which will expedite review of your applications.

The minimum five-year C2 budget for all schools and libraries is \$30,175, with the exception of Tribal libraries, which have a \$66,386 minimum five-year C2 budget. Tribal libraries at the highest discount level will receive a 90 percent discount off the costs of eligible C2 equipment and services.

New BEAR/SPI Selection Added to FY2026 E-Rate FCC Form 471 Application

The FY2026 FCC Form 471 was updated with a new, required field below the **Narrative** to collect the invoicing method of the Funding Request Number (FRN) for each funding request. The applicant decides which method to use on a particular FRN: either the FCC Form 472 (Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR)) or the FCC Form 474 (Service Provider Invoicing (SPI)). The [Select an Invoicing Method in E-Rate](#) infographic explains the invoicing methods. See the “E-Rate Program Updates” article in the [December 2025 E-Rate News Brief](#) for more details.

Preparing for the FY2026 Application Filing window

Applicants will need to use EPC to apply for discounts. In 2021, we added an additional step to the login process. To access EPC, you must first log in to One Portal, our multi-factor authentication (MFA) system. MFA is a method of authenticating a computer user during the login process by requiring the user to enter two or more separate pieces of information, such as a password known to the user and a code we generate and send to the user by email or text.

Existing EPC users can click the blue **Sign In** button at the top of any [USAC](#) page and follow the instructions. To see a demonstration of the login process, you can watch the [Forgot Password](#) video (The process of logging in for the first time and the process of resetting your existing password are essentially the same).

Newly created EPC users will automatically be set up with a One Portal account using their email address as their username. As above, click the blue **Sign In** button to get started. If you need assistance, call our Customer Service Center (CSC) at (888) 203-8100.

Applicants Who Are Starting the Application Process for FY2026

Applicants begin the process of applying for discounts on eligible equipment and services by completing and certifying an [FCC Form 470](#) (Description of Services Requested and Certification Form) in EPC. This opens the [competitive bidding process](#), the process by which applicants identify and request the products and services needed so that potential service providers can review those requests and submit bids for them. View the [Competitive Bidding Infographic](#) to learn about key process steps.

The entity that will conduct the competitive bidding process must be prepared to receive and evaluate bids and negotiate with service providers.

You do not have to file an FCC Form 470 for FY2026 if:

- You will be purchasing services from a state master contract where your state filed an FCC Form 470 and conducted a competitive bidding process, and that resulting state master contract covers the equipment and services for all of FY2026 (i.e., July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027).
- You posted an FCC Form 470 for a previous funding year and conducted a competitive bidding process that resulted in a multi-year contract that covers your equipment and services for all of FY2026.
- You are purchasing a commercially available, high-speed business-class Internet service that meets **all** of the requirements listed in the Exemption from Filing an FCC Form 470 section of the [Applicant Step 1: Competitive Bidding](#) guidance document on the USAC website.
- You are a library purchasing \$3,600 or less in total Category Two equipment in FY2026.

Remember that you must wait at least 28 days after you submit and certify your FCC Form 470 before you can evaluate bids, select a service provider, sign a contract, and submit and certify your FCC Form 471.

Applicants Who Have Completed Their Competitive Bidding Process and Signed a Contract

If you are using a new or existing contract on your FCC Form 471, you must have a contract record for that contract in your EPC profile. A contract record provides specific details about a contract – e.g., the establishing FCC Form 470, the number of bids received, the service provider, the contract term and associated dates – so that the contract information can be auto-populated from your profile to the appropriate funding request on your FCC Form 471.

You can create contract records in your EPC profile by going to the organization page for the parent organization (independent school, school district, independent library, library system, or consortium) and clicking **Contracts** from the menu choices at the top of the page, then choose **Manage Contracts**, and then choose **Add a New Contract**. For more information, please see [How to Create a Contract Record](#) on E-Rate's video webpage.

- You do not need to create a new contract record for a multi-year contract or a contract with voluntary extensions if you previously created the contract record in EPC for that contract.
- For a contract that has been voluntarily extended through FY2026, you can include the existing contract record on the appropriate funding request on your FCC Form 471. Then, enter the extended date in the field labeled, "What is the date your contract expires for the current term of the contract?"
- If you have a new contract or need to make changes to an existing contract record, you **must** create a new contract record. EPC does not allow edits to a contract record after it has been submitted. You are encouraged – but not required – to upload a copy of your contract into your contract record. If you do not upload your contract, be sure to keep a copy handy in case USAC requests it during the review of your application. In addition, FCC document retention rules require you to retain and provide documentation when requested by USAC for at least 10 years after the end of the applicable funding year or last date of service, whichever date is later.

Applicants **must** be able to demonstrate that they had a contract or other legally binding agreement in place at the time they submitted and certified an FCC Form 471. Find more information on the [Contracts](#) page or view the [How to Create a Contract Record](#) video.

To learn more about the E-Rate program, please review the [December 2025 E-Rate News Brief](#), and if you are Tribal library or TCU library, please consider joining [T-LEAP](#).

[Lifeline](#)

Reminder: FCC Form 555 Submission Window Closing Soon

The 2025 FCC Form 555 (Annual Lifeline Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Certification Form) submission window will close at **11:59 p.m. ET on Monday, February 2, 2026**. The form is available for completion in [One Portal](#) and must be submitted by providers by the designated deadline.

For more information on the FCC Form 555, providers can visit Lifeline's [Annual Filings](#) page.

Reminder: FCC Order on California Effective February 1

On November 20, 2025, the Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued an [Order](#) announcing that starting **February 1, 2026**, California Lifeline service providers will need to use the National Verifier to determine eligibility and the National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) to enroll eligible consumers in the federal Lifeline program.

For additional details regarding the upcoming transition, service providers in California are encouraged to review the following training materials:

- [California FCC Order and USAC Systems Office Hours](#)
- [Representative Accountability Database \(RAD\) 101 Office Hours](#)
- [National Lifeline Accountability Database \(NLAD\) 101 Office Hours](#)

2026 Recertification to Begin in February

Recertification is an annual requirement that ensures active Lifeline subscribers are still eligible to receive the Lifeline benefit. USAC expects to initiate the 2026 recertification process for consumers around the third week of February. USAC will announce the official start date soon.

Once initiated, recertification will include California broadband-only consumers who qualified through the National Verifier process and are enrolled in NLAD. USAC will announce at a later time when recertification will begin for the remaining California consumers who were previously determined eligible by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

Recertification Subscriber Status Report Update

On January 27, USAC removed the 'Anniversary Date' column from the Recertification Subscriber Status Report in NLAD. Service providers will no longer be able to see this column, as recertification is no longer based on a subscriber's anniversary date.

To learn more about the recertification process, service providers should visit our [Recertification](#) page.

February 2026 Webinar: Lifeline Claims System 101

Join us on **Wednesday, February 11, 2026**, for our next Lifeline program webinar exploring the Lifeline Claims System and the processes service providers must follow to successfully submit, certify, and revise claims. [Register](#) for the February 2026 monthly webinar. Recordings of previous webinars are available on our [Webinars](#) page.

[High Cost](#)

Annual HUBB Filing Due March 2, 2026

Carriers participating in modernized Connect America Fund (CAF) programs with defined fixed broadband buildout obligations have until March 2, 2026, to file and certify deployment data with USAC's [High Cost](#)

[Universal Broadband \(HUBB\)](#) portal showing where they built out mass-market, high-speed Internet service in calendar year 2025 or certify that they have “no locations to upload.”

This includes carriers participating in the [Rural Digital Opportunity Fund](#) (RDOF), [Bringing Puerto Rico Together \(Uniendo a Puerto Rico\) Fund](#) and the [Connect USVI Fund](#) (PR/USVI Funds), and the [Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model](#) (Enhanced ACAM) program, which will be reporting deployment data in the HUBB using location IDs from the [Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric](#) (Fabric), a single, standardized dataset of all locations in the US where fixed broadband access service is available or could be installed.

To learn more about Filing in the HUBB Portal, review the [webinar recording](#) and [slide deck](#).

Key Dates and Trainings

E-Rate | E-Rate Pre-Commitment Process Q&A Session

Thursday, February 19, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

Lifeline | Lifeline Claims System

Wednesday, February 11, 2026, at 3 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

RHC | FY2026 HCF Program Funding Request Office Hours #2

Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

RHC | FY2026 Telecom Program Funding Request Office Hours #2

Wednesday, February 11, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

USF Program Technical Assistance

The USAC Customer Service Center (CSC) provides customer service for all USF programs. Visit the Contact USAC page to get in touch with specialized agents trained in the specifics of each program.

Questions or suggestions? Contact USAC's Tribal Liaison at TribalLiaison@usac.org.

This email was sent to:

Please do not reply to this email.

[Manage Subscriptions](#) | [Unsubscribe](#)

USAC | 700 12th Street NW, Suite 900 | Washington, DC 20005
www.usac.org | © 1997- 2026 USAC | All Rights Reserved | [USAC Privacy Policy](#)